MS 10888 1/4

Notes of an Interview with the B.B.C. on November 14th, 1928.

A Deputation from the Society of Women Musicians, consisting of the President (Mrs Newmarch), the Hon. Officers - Miss Dorothy Erhart and Miss Marion Scott -, and Miss Katharine Eggar, were received at Savoy Hill.

The President said there were various points with regard to the question of the non-employment of women in the B.B.C. wireless orchestra which the deputation wished to bring forward.

Miss Erhart said there were so many rumours with reference to the organisation of the Wireless orchestra. They had no desire to force an open door, but the S.W.M. viewed with disquiet the fact that there were no women players now in that orchestra, - although in some of the B.B.C. National Symphony concerts, and in the Promenades run by them for the last two years, women players had been included.

Mr Percy Pitt explained that last year Sir Henry Wood had wanted to have his own orchestra which included women players, but it was understood at the time that, though agreed to then, there would be discussion later as to their retention. The ladies were only there because of this arrangement with Sir Henry Wood.

Miss Erhart asked what was their reason for wishing to have men only.

Mr Pitt said that men were preferred because their tone was bigger and stronger. There was no objection otherwise to having women. Sir Henry Wood's orchestra was the weakest in London.

Miss Erhart said surely the question was one of standard of playing.

10888 7/4

She referred to the fact that the Philharmonic Society had used women players now for two years.

Miss Scott said that the principal oboe in the Birmingham orchestra was a woman, and Dr Adrian Boult had told her that he had promoted her because she was the finest player.

Miss Erhart said, in view of the fact that there were varying opinions on the subject of women in orchestras, and that the B.B.C. was a National institution, with powers conferred upon it by a Parliament which now included women, would it not be a pity if the B.B.C. orchestra were not a national one, and representative of both men and women.

Mr Pitt said in reply that the B.B.C. were trying to form a permanent "National Orchestra" to play in regular series of concerts, and there would shortly be auditions for this. They would be only too pleased if women players presented themselves for audition, and they would be given the same chance as the men. There was no anti-feminine policy.

Miss Erhart suggested that there were some men orchestral players who were prejudiced against the women.

Mr Pitt was emphatic in his reply that no feeling of that sort would be allowed to make any difference.

Miss Erhart asked when the new policy with regard to the orchestra would come into force.

Mr Pitt replied - in a few months time, in the spring, so that they would be ready to start in the autumn with a regular series of orchestral concerts.

Miss Scott said they would like to make it clear that the Society were

10888 3/4

keen on a high standard, and that in taking up the matter they were not doing so on behalf of certain players.

Miss Eggar said, - Mr Pitt had laid stress on the necessity for amount of tone from string-players, but there was quality as well as quantity to be considered. Women's voices differ and are not inferior, and in string-playing, women are bringing in another quality of tone, and people must learn to listen for this.

Mr Pitt - you don't want to hear the brass above the strings; in some of the modern works, as in Wagner and Puccini, where the outside compass of the brass instruments is used, the strings must be equally strong.

Mrs Newmarch - you must bear in mind that in Sir Henry Wood's orchestra the strings were not up to full strength.

Miss Scott said that as a practical string-player she knew that the production of tone was not a matter of strength and weight, - it might be called knack -, but anyhow it was an individual matter, and m many women string-players were stronger, though others might be weaker, than men.

Miss Erhart asked, if the policy of auditions to women was adopted by the B.B.C., would volume of tone be made the first consideration.

Mr Pitt said that it was most important, but that women would have an equal chance at the auditions.

Mr Eckersley asked if women played in the Continental orchestras.

Miss Scott gave Amsterdam as an instance where women were included, and Mr Pitt mentioned that ~~they~~ in Geneva they had them, but not in the United States.

10888 4/4

RCM London

(4)

He (Mr Pitt) said that Sir Thomas Beecham, who would conduct for the B.B.C., had an open mind on the subject.

Miss Erhart hoped that the B.B.C. would give a lead in this direction.

Mrs Newmarch reminded them that women were great users of wireless, and supporters of concerts and music generally. As players some were very much better than men.

Mr Eckersley, in reply to a question about the auditions, promised that the Society should have private information as to when they started. There would be no handicap, and women would have the same chance as men of knowing when these were to take place. It would probably be broadcast.

Miss Erhart asked if women would be amongst the judges.

Mrs Newmarch said that it would not be fair if it depended entirely on the conductor to choose the players.

Miss Eggar said, - nobody can do without experience, and that to judge fairly, it must be remembered that women were new to this. Nervousness for instance at the auditions should be allowed for.

Miss Erhart asked if there could be a Committee to choose the players. She suggested that when the feeling of an individual judge was against seeing women in orchestras, even if he were broad-minded, the fact that a women was there for audition might predispose him unfavourably.

Mr Pitt said in reply that it must be left to the permanent conductor, Sir Thomas Beecham, to choose his own players.

In conclusion, Mr Eckersley said he hoped enough had been said to convince the deputation that the B.B.C. had no anti-feminine complex, and that they undertook to give women-players an equal chance with men